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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a longitudinal study, known as the Rancho Plan, begun in 1976 at a high school in California. The study was conducted to experiment with planned change in organizational and instructional structures. The data which have emerged offer teachers' recollections of what was and connect them to the long-term effects of a planned change effort. The Rancho Plan focused on the concept of professional communities which offer increased site-level autonomy, shared goals, norms, and objectives, and where teachers are involved in the decision-making process. The Rancho Plan was on the cutting edge of research and embodied what all new findings recommend. Since it was ahead of its time, it allows researchers to see what time has done to the early visions of what this school could, and should, become. Stories told by teachers in the Rancho experiment provide glimpses of the ways in which departments have developed into distinct professional communities. Rancho serves as a case history of an early attempt at what is now being promoted as restructuring, a reform effort involving educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. (LL)

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SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING AND SUBJECT SUBCULTURES

Leslie Santee Siskin

This is, in part, a case study of a single high school in California, which back in 1976 began an experiment, a planned change in organizational and instructional structures. A case study of a single school always raises questions about the possibility, and the advisability, of attempting to generalize from a single site, and this story may be particularly suspect, since in one sense, it is a story of a school that might have been-- a case of planned change that didn't quite turn out the way anyone planned. Moreover, since the experiment began almost 15 years ago, this might be considered ancient history in educational research. But that time span allows for a rare glimpse into longitudinal data, as teachers remember what was and connect it to the long-term effects (or non-effects) of a planned change effort. Moreover, this effort, and its effects, are particularly salient today since Rancho's planned change looked very much like what now goes by the name of restructuring, and restructuring is something that educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners are almost unavoidably entangled with today, when "the political climate has made [it] hard to resist" (Boyd, 1987, p.94).

Although the focus of this paper, and of the collection of papers in this session, is on the concept of professional communities, I want to briefly set this study within the context of the restructuring movement, because restructuring attempts depend on implicit assumptions about the school as a professional community--one to which increased site-level autonomy should be granted, and in which shared goals, norms, and objectives will be established. These are assumptions which the Rancho case calls into question, and which the established literature on professional and occupational communities take as problematic, for the focus there has been to highlight interdependence and interconnectedness rather than autonomy, and internal divisions and groupings rather than unitary goals. This literature, then, suggests that in understanding the case of Rancho, or any attempt to restructure, we need to look not only at the school as unit-of-change, but also at the external communities of which the local schools are a part, and the internal sub-communities which partition local schools

(see, for example, Huberman, 1990; Little, 1990b; Siskin, 1991; Van Maanen & Barley, 1987).

The early eighties were a difficult time for schools, and for educators, as claims of crisis and charges of failure were levied from all sides. From the public came articles like "Why Public Schools Fail," (Newsweek, 1981); "Help! Teacher Can't Teach" (Time, 1980); from business leaders came claims that they could no longer compete in the international marketplace with the products our schools were turning out, and demands for "quality control"; from a spate of national reports came titles such as "A Nation at Risk" and the rhetoric of impending doom: "We have been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) ; and finally from the legislators came a "virtual explosion" of activity (Kirst 1983) culminating in over 1,000 pieces of state legislation (Darling-Hammond and Berry, 1988). By 1983, the year the National Commission on Excellence in Education released "A Nation at Risk," 38 states had mandated student testing requirements, 35 had launched new curriculum development efforts, and 30 had imposed district- or school-level planning requirements (ECS, 1983).

Within a few years, however, a so-called "second wave" brought to center stage an apparently miraculous intervention, as educational rhetoric moved from "A Nation at Risk" to "A Nation Prepared" (Carnegie). The language of doom escalated to apocalyptical promise as advocates sought to bring us to the dawn of a new era: the state of New York, for example, released its "Compact for Learning" which begins "As the millennium approaches." And the 1991 Association of Teacher Educators in Canada pronounced its convention "On the threshold of a new age: Restructuring Teacher Education." The RJR Nabisco Corporation offered $100,000 to $250,000 annual grants to what it calls "Next Century Schools": schools which will develop restructured structures to include shared commitment by school and community, a plan for "sustained, wide-ranging change" which will "extend beyond traditional concepts or the status quo" because "the next century is just around the corner."

Emerging from the fallout is the growing sense that what education, and the nations, need, is a complete restructuring of schools, and, even more surprising, that teachers need to be involved in the decision-making process for the effort to work. This

is something that a wide range of reformers, observers, practitioners, and policymakers agree on although, or perhaps because, there is so little agreement on what, specifically, "restructuring" means. Taking its lessons from research on "effective schools" and from a generation of change studies that suggest policymakers "can't mandate what matters" and can't make effective policy without considering the level of the school (Purkey & Smith, 1983; McLaughlin, 1987) this reform attempt seems to have moved beyond those findings to assume that change must occur at the level of the individual school, and that the school is therefore the appropriate unit of change. Advocates argue for not just a new structure, but for local schools to have the ability, and the responsibility, to develop, modify, and design the appropriate structure themselves (Schlecty, 1991)

It is this assumption, that the school is the most appropriate unit of change, and what are apparently underlying assumptions that the school is a discrete and unitary body, that the Rancho case leads us to question, and that link the agenda of restructuring to discussions of professional community. For there has been a tendency in the restructuring movement to think we can, and should, consider the school as a discrete unit (as if somehow we could isolate it from the larger educational communities within which it is inextricably embedded and interconnected), and to consider the school as if it were somehow a unitary whole (as if a common, and commonly shared, goal would override patterns of complex, and sometimes competing, internal divisions. And it is the literature on professional communities which has been most attentive to both external connections and internal divisions.

Rancho, then, serves as a case history of an early attempt at what is now being promoted as restructuring, and illustrates the interaction of a restructuring attempt with external and internal community forces. For according to a former principal "Rancho seems to be ahead of its time. It embodied what all the new commission reports recommend" (RA081). And since it was "ahead of its time" it allows us to see what time has done to the early visions of what this school could, and should, become.

The Rancho Plan

In 1976 a team of administrators and teachers, selected before the school was even built, were authorized by a supportive district to "be something different," and to develop what resembled a site-based management program. This was a growing community, with a fairly stable, middle class population, and the team spent the first planning year analyzing local student needs and devising structural alternatives. Although they relied primarily on local taxes for funding, they obtained extra state funds available through the state program for what was then called "School Improvement" but which sounds much like the grants currently available for "restructuring"--grants for school sites which would put forward innovative proposals and would include, in some form, community involvement, with community involvement defined to include faculty, staff, student and parent input in decision-making.

After a year of planning, of assessing students and community needs, the team put forward their "Rancho Compact." As one of the original teachers remembers it:

> At that time there was a strong message from the district to decentralize. Rancho was supposed to be different. The School Improvement Council was supposed to be a viable, powerful body. As a teacher I would have input over what happened in the school. We had leadership training, training in conflict resolution, shared decision-making. We were on the cutting edge. We could generate our own curriculum to match student needs; we had resources, time, money. (RA033.01:2)

Through the "Rancho Plan" they were given free rein to define what they saw as necessary to develop a good school for their particular student body--to design staffing patterns, curriculum, even to be involved in the design of the building itself; through district support and state funding they were given the resources to put their design in place. The necessary alterations in "rules, roles, and relationships" and the attention to desired "results" by which Corbett (1991) characterizes restructuring all came into play as the Rancho team created "a special vision in terms of educational design" (SC001.01:3).

By all accounts it was an exhilarating period. An administrator recalls it as the "Camelot period where things were possible and funding was possible. A different time" (RA090.01). And a Social Studies teacher describes how "I said all these years I've been putting my fingers in curricular dikes. Wouldn't it be grand to build one? Build a

program the way it should be?" (SC001.01:4). He likens the feeling of creativity and potential in those first years to "kind of walking with the gods" (SC001.01:16).

The vision which this team developed called for deliberate restructuring of traditional organizational design, replacing departmental divisions and hierarchical levels with three advisory units. All staff, including administrators, 85 teachers, counseling, and clerical staff, were divided into these units, called "learning houses." Each unit would operate to some degree independently, but all shared the same central function: advising students. Each unit member has a core group of about 23 students with whom to meet in a once a week advisory period, and for whom to act as advocate for over the students entire four year stay in the school. Advisors would be "monitors for success as well as for failure." The Rancho design centered around the needs of the students, since, as an English teacher explains "student needs would drive what the units would produce" (RA070.01) but was also attentive to the needs of staff for collegial interaction in that the units would provide "a sense of community" that the school as a whole was too large to provide. Other teachers confirm the value of the units to their own needs: "the unit provided a structure for community, a means of support" (RA092.St1:1) observes one teacher; "it makes the school smaller and mitigates alienation" notes another (RA087.01:1).

The staff who were chosen for this school, and who chose to come to Rancho, were by all accounts a special group of people-- on a number of dimensions. They were strong academically. They were also, as one teacher remembers, "leaders, opinion setters." Another describes them as "the risk-takers. It was a very innovative school; it was going to try to set a brand new trend in education" (RA021.01). Yet another describes them as "boat-rockers" and "rebels" among other, more graphic terms ("shit-disturbers"), and adds that their former schools were at least as happy to be rid of them as Rancho was to welcome them (SC001.01). They either came in as, or were quickly converted to, advocates for the special mission of caring for students.

And their commitment to the students, and to a caring relationship with them, appears at times extraordinary. One teacher recalls how she had a problem with one student:

> It was about five years ago. She was being abused, and I said 'why don't you come home, you know, feel that you can stay at my house if it gets really bad.... That night there was the daughter, there was the mother, and there was the son. They moved in. Of course, I allowed it to happen, but they moved in. They stayed with me so long (about 6 weeks) that I was afraid that I was going to have to buy a six foot Christmas tree. (RA029St1).

Yet even with the extraordinary staff selected and committed to the Rancho vision, even with the extra resources, there was an awareness of the difficulties inherent in what they were trying to do. Of particular concern was the potency of the traditional departmentalized boundaries, which the new structure set out deliberately to break down:

> It was designed in order to allow people to meet people outside of their department. It was to get away from The English Department, The Math Department. So people were in units where they were mixed. . . that was the whole idea to have the units: to get away from each department for themselves. (RA089.01:15)

The administrators who were coming into the school all saw strong departments as a threat to what they wanted to accomplish. One explains that "the three administrators who came here when the school opened were all strong department chairmen. In their own schools. And I think we all saw the dangers of a school that has a department, for whatever reason, that becomes sort of the tail that wags the dog" (RA090.01). For them the units were a way of avoiding the fragmentation, and the competition, which they had seen in their own experience:

> The units were really a way of having teachers structured in a non-departmental fashion. And the thing they had in common was being advisors, and the focus was the role of the advisor. And the idea was that you would force teachers, because of the set that you would put them in, you would force them to really look at the total student. And to look at the educational experience from an organizational point of view. And so when you talk about organizational changes, or thrust, or looking at a new magnet focus, or trying to decide how to realign advisory, you do it through that arena. Now there are still some things that you can discuss in your department. The department focus is fairly narrow, isn't it? It has been. They tend to look at English as the only thing that is of concern. And you know, perhaps that's the way it should be. You need to have some of that kind of an ethnocentric way of looking at it. But we wanted for each teacher to play both of those roles. To also look at the school as a whole, just as an administrator does, or a counselor. Most teachers don't have that experience in high school. (RA090.01:0)

Yet they recognized that factors both external, in the expectations of the wider community, and internal, in the orientation of subject-specialist teachers, and would push and pull on the unit structure. For these teachers refer repeatedly to their sense of belonging to the wider, subject-based community--to need "to go to science conferences and things like that" (RA057.02:8), to their friendships with teachers from within their fields but outside the school, to the demands of subject-based exams such as the College Boards and Advanced Placement tests, and to the feedback of returning students who report on their performance in the subject in college. One of the original English teachers remembers the push "from outside--colleges, district mandates," observing almost wistfully that it was "intended to be interdisciplinary" but "the secondary school was simply too entrenched in their [traditional] structure, particularly in terms of curriculum, so that "everyone was willing, there was extra money to make it work, but the plan just didn't materialize." They tried a variety of experiments but they "couldn't resist the weight" of the push; it was just "too much to take on" (RA070.01:2).

And the vice-principal comments on pull from inside--from the strength of the individual teachers' orientation to subject:

> We had representatives from the units, that were elected by their constituents, they were to kind of represent the student and the school as a whole. And of course, none of that is that clean . . . no teacher is ever going to think about his role as an advisor and forget that he's a social studies teacher. But it's interesting, when people are given roles, they tend to somewhat fulfill those roles. I think that kind of happened. (RA090.01).

Strife, Stress, Chaos

In the beginning, despite the push and pull of subject-specific pressures, the teachers, and the units, did "tend to somewhat fulfill these roles." The organizational chart of the school listed the names of all staff members in three columns, one for each unit. Within each column were groupings of "learning areas"--such as Communication or Cultural Skills--with departmental affiliation reduced to a parenthetical abbreviation. The unit offices, where teachers had their desks, began to fill with the trappings to make them more attractive, and more of a home base--coffee makers, microwave, a comfortable couch, posters and pictures. And each unit began to take on a distinct

identity, a personality of its own: "Unit 3 is argumentative; Unit 1 has strong personalities; Unit 2 is the good guys. . . [we] find it easy to make decisions, we get along" reports a perhaps somewhat biased member of Unit 2 (RA070.01).

But following quickly on the heels of the Camelot era came a series of unforeseen, and unforeseeable events which created a period teachers characterize as one of "strife, stress, chaos." For even a site-based management school is embedded within the context of the larger educational community, and actions taken by the district, state, and even the courts played a critical role in shaping events at Rancho. A vice-principal recalls her experience vividly:

> We had a year to plan this school. Then we had what we call the "We Agree" with the staff, commitments, and then moved from there. And the structure was that every four years you recommit . . . kind of a fine-tuning thing. . . that was nice, because we were a SIP [School Improvement Program] school, and we could use SIP days, and then the Board took those away, and said no, we do not want to have students that are not going to school, we want them in school for longer hours. And that was devastating. So, but that was only one thing. It was sort of like a contingency universe. You touch this one little thing there didn't seem in and of itself all that significant, but it really had a rippling effect to all kinds of things.
>
> I can tell you, in the time that I was an administrator here we went through such horrendous [things]: we went through a strike, we went through Prop 13, we went through a reconfiguration of the total secondary program from a 3 year high school to a 4 year high school. In the meantime, after Prop 13, we went from a 6 period school day to a 5 period day. Then we phased in, and this was all because of the bankruptcy, we went back to a 6 period day for 9th and 10th graders only. This all during the time that I was a curriculum VP here. Learning how to do this it was really traumatic. But it just shows you, boy, I'll tell you, you survive and kids still learn, and things still go on. (RA090.01)

In the swirl of activity this administrator recounted, three sets of events stand out as critical to the functioning of the Rancho design--altering the financial, the demographic, and the curricular make-up of the school.

First, and almost immediately, came financial challenges. Proposition 13, the California taxpayer revolt, sharply curtailed the ability of local authority to raise taxes, and dramatically increased the dependence of local districts on state aid. In the next few years the district would lay off over five hundred teachers, cut the high school day to five periods, and eliminate support positions which had been crucial to the Rancho

design, such as counselors, as well as department chairs. Without this support, the teachers found themselves on overload, as "they changed the names but the work remained."

When next the state, in turn facing fiscal shortfalls, decided that districts with declining enrollments would receive no increases in aid, the district situation worsened. As relations between the school and the district grew increasingly tense, and strikes became a regular occurrence, the Board closed 17 schools and moved the ninth graders into what had been 10-12 high schools, assigning into Rancho a new group of teachers who were neither selected for nor committed to the advisory program. At that time too, in response to the Board's decisions to defer agreed-upon pay raises, and to continue to lay off large numbers of staff (575), the teachers began what would become a persistent tradition of "work-to-rule" practice, refusing to perform any but contractually-specified tasks--a hardship in any school, but particularly in one which depends on a model of participatory decision making. Department meetings, unit meetings, curriculum development, work on developing a new peer observation program-- all come to screeching halt, since all such activities are dependent on teachers taking on more than they are obligated, or paid, to do. As one Rancho teacher put it "we aren't going to kill ourselves when we don't feel there is any pay off there" (RA027.01). Another noted that the problem "shows up in class: teachers say they are not working as hard; they pretend to be working; they're unhappy; their hearts are not in their work" (RA071.01).

Second came a court order, a desegregation plan which dramatically changed the student body, dispersing the neighborhood students whose needs the plan had been designed to serve, and bringing in new students, with new sets of problems. As one teacher says, "We've gone from being a school that was very, very middle class and upper middle class to a wide range of students and all the problems they bring" (RA038.01). And they bring these problems from longer distances: the magnet program means students come from diverse and distant neighborhoods. For a school structured around community input and involvement this made getting parents into the building almost impossible, and the busing that brings the students in made altogether impossible the extra contact, the before and after school conferences with teachers which had been a cornerstone of the program: "The court monitor should ride the bus for one solid

month, every day, to see what it's really like for these kids, and to be subjected to the same gang aspects on the same bus, and to be subject to the insults and the inconvenience" (RA029.01).

With the new students, many of whom do not speak English, teachers found themselves having to develop new skills to teach new assignments--ESL classes, transition classes--where they wanted to maintain the school goals of personalization and caring, but were not always sure how. And district support was often absent, or in some instances devastatingly present, but dissonant with the school goals--as when the district brought in a consultant to work with teachers around an adopted transition program. A frustrated teacher recounted how a student asked a question in class, unsure of what a word in the story had meant, so the teacher turned to the class to see if anyone else could provide the answer. The consultant, who happened to be in the room, later "just got all over my case and said 'never have another student answer another student's question. . . don't take time with her, she's just sidetracking you; you've got to keep this pace up.' It was just awful" (RA029.St).

In another move which made the district's presence devastatingly felt, the central office moved to centralize and standardize curriculum to ensure that all students were receiving equal opportunity to learn. From the Superintendent's perspective, this was essential: there is "no choice. We need to be consistent. We have to standardize access and curriculum. It is not a matter of philosophy; it is a matter of necessity. Suddenly, people at the district level are working on aligning, standardizing, etc. Teachers resent this" (ZZ003.01).

And the teachers at Rancho clearly did resent this, for it undermined the essence of what they thought their school was all about and removed the sense of control over decisions critical to their work:

> You had staff input, shared decision-making; you felt like you had control of your fate. When they centralized they took away the control of the school; they made edicts outside the school. It just goes on and on and you felt totally helpless.. . . As the board became more and more conservative and started to become centralized, it started reviewing some of [the principal's] decisions. And once you did that he had to take the responsibility for our decisions and he started overriding decisions that the School Improvement Council made, or not using the SIC as a vehicle. (RA033.01).

Finally, there came the effects of the first wave of educational reform, as the state omnibus education bill began to hit the classrooms in a series of "framework" guidelines covering texts, content, and teaching techniques, and tests to monitor their adoption. While this bill had been adopted back in 1983, it has taken several years for the actual guidelines to reach the schools. Increasingly, then, curricular decisions are seen as centralized, standardized, and distanced from the classroom and the school decision making structures.

The list may seem like an extraordinary litany of disasters, and may call into question just what this case can possibly have to do with other attempts at restructuring, for how could this bizarre confluence of crises ever be repeated. But even a quick look at recent newspapers suggests that the case may not be unique: San Francisco is facing state and district budget deficits, the California frameworks are still coming down and new tests coming up. In New York, where there has been a strong push for restructuring, the educational system is confronting fiscal crisis, and the Regents Board is redesigning curricular requirements at the state level. And across the country while teachers are concerned with the need to reconfigure programs to meet the challenges of changing neighborhoods, of changing needs of diverse groups of students, there is increasing talk and active research on the feasibility of a uniform national test.

Reassertion of Departmental Communities

For this paper, however, what is central is not why or whether restructuring attempts are likely to face more formidable challenges than those who advocate making the school the unit of change foretell, but how under conditions of stress from the external educational community even a group of teachers dedicated to restructuring design, convinced of the need to overcome departmental fragmentation and divisiveness, committed in extraordinary ways to the needs of students, and willing to take extraordinary means to address those needs, retreat into the traditional departmental divisions which they originally defined as part of the problem.

For under such conditions of strife and stress, the departmental boundaries at Rancho have been reasserted. The members of each subject area have retreated into the familiar territory of the department, and within each have developed distinctive norms,

values, and relationships to sustain them. One of the department chairs notes that even administrators tend to gravitate toward their former subject areas: "more attention is given to that department. I'm sure it's because it's their comfort zone; it's where they feel most comfortable" and with the other areas they "feel like they're out of their league. I don't mean that as a put-down; I just mean that's the way it is." (RA029.01p7). And teachers in such a turbulent environment find themselves in need of a "comfort zone."

Science was the first to go, breaking off even before the state guidelines hit. Despite the initial aim of breaking down departmental divisions, the science classes were architecturally clustered around water and gas lines of their labs. Built as spokes around central common area, without walls, this classroom structure meant that science teachers early and inevitably became closely connected. They could see and hear what was going on in each others' classes, and found it necessary to coordinate planning, so that one class would not be taking a test while the group next door was listening to a clearly audible lecture.

And although they were assigned originally to desks in the unit offices, they found themselves as connected to their lab stations as the gas lines were: "In science, and I would think in classes like Home Ec, and Shop, activity-oriented classes, it's impossible. You can't do your preparation away from your materials. You cannot do that from a unit office. It's impossible" (RA057.D1).

With their close contact, and early frustration with the "they" that could not understand their needs and had provided them with inappropriate conditions and materials, the science teachers quickly coalesced into a distinct and distinctive sub-group: a Social Studies teacher explained that "they were nicknamed at one time, the swarm" (SC001.01p12). They found that as a group, as a "swarm" of Science teachers, they were able to make demands on the system. The principal describes how "Science is very independent and good, but they complain the most. I like them. They've filed a lot of grievances" (RA080.01a).

Their independence, and activism, are readily apparent. The story is told, with relish, by several members, of how, early on, they came into the unit offices took their desks (all are men): "You can't do your preparation away from your materials. And so

we just, one at a time, carried our desks over here. And the principal at the time was real upset about it. He didn't say anything to us, but he was real upset about it, the fact that we had left our unit offices and come out here and isolated ourselves" (RA057.D1). They literally picked up and left the unit offices, and now report that they have little reason to venture out from their stronghold.

Again, the particular architectural arrangements of the labs made the departmental organization work differently in science. Instead of department chairs, Rancho has "lead teachers" or "department contacts" (although in most interviews they are still referred to as chairmen). District cost-cutting took away their release time, and made it difficult to accomplish what had been their routine responsibilities: "they change the name, but the person still gets to do all the work" (RA021.01:11). In most cases, however, department members decided to increase the size of their own classes to free the chair of one class assignment. But because their are only a limited number of stations in each lab, the science teachers do not have this option. Their alternative, since they have "over a hundred years" of prior chairing experience among them, was to share the work. They divided most of the administrative responsibilities among four teachers, but much of the decision making involved the whole department.

The collective strength of the department also served as a base for political action-- several of the science teachers are or have been active as union representatives, and one described how the fears of administrative retaliation for union activism are lessened due to the privileged status of science teachers since "to an extent the science teachers are an endangered species" (RA021.02p1). One active union member, who is not in science, commented on the disproportionate representation of science teachers in union activities, saying that "there's something about mathematicians and scientists when they get this social conscience that seems to say 'I know how to do this'" (SC001.01:12). And a new teacher described how he was socialized into the shared political as well as professional values of this department: "the science department is very strong in the union," and eating lunch together "they'd talk about problems. . . and the more I found out the angrier I got" until he also became a union rep (RA065.U).

While Science may provide the most dramatic examples of department as distinct community, these teachers are far from alone in their departmental solidarity. The Math

teachers work closely around curricular and instructional matters. As one describes it "we do, as a department, plan what needs to be covered in a year, and we have what's called readiness tests" to determine who can go on to the next level, and supplemental materials "the department put together before I came here, and we've all agreed to use that in addition to the textbook" (RA035Tra). A number of teachers report sitting in on each others classes to learn how the material is taught, before they take on that course themselves. One tells how he sat in on a Calculus class even "though I had to give up my own prep time to do it" and of how another teacher, who was assigned Pre-algebra which "she had never taught before, she came into my class everyday; she gave up her prep everyday. . . and would be two days behind me and just follow what I did. That seemed to help her "(RA035Tra).

In this department teachers are tightly tied by the strength of their common assumptions, and also by the length of their shared experience--several of the leaders have been teaching together since the late 60's, and they have "brought [the others] in" across a number of schools. But rather than as a "swarm" which directs activity outward to school and district politics, the Math department seems to observers to have retreated inward--to where they can count on a common understanding. "It is an unhappy feeling, is it not?" observes one teacher from his vantage of outside the department (SC001.01p19), and later refers to the department attitude as "this sort of inward withdrawal. . . it's the same syndrome of always fighting the last war sort of thing" (p19-20). They have, as a group, refused to participate in a number of school activities, ranging from the first year interviews for this study to a recent meeting called when the principal found he had additional monies to distribute: "I told him 'I don't want to come to your meeting; we'll just take what we agreed to. . . you'd think he would welcome it; there's never enough money, and this was one less voice fighting for it" (RA046.02).

The sense of embattlement is very strong here, for in the recent movements to district standardization and state guidelines, the Math department both has the most to lose and is the most likely to lose. Within the department teachers share a set of assumptions about testing, placement and tracking which are seen as essential. Outside the department, these assumptions are not only not shared, but are actively opposed by school, district, and state officials. "We think there are three levels of kids in this school

below Algebra 1, and most people don't want to believe that," said one Math teacher, and to the Math department the difference in these levels is obvious. But, he continued, "the movers and shakers in the educational business, at least in this district, want to deny [that]. . . Folks that are saying that don't know; they just don't know. They're just on a political kind of trip." The decision is highly consequential to the Math teachers who have to deal with what are to them wrongly placed students: "they're just going to have a miserable year and fail, and I'll have a miserable year, the kids that are OK will have a miserable year; everything's miserable because. . . folks won't admit that they should be more attentive to where they put kids" (RA046St1:5). From this perspective, the decision is clearly consequential, but from outside the shared understanding of the Math department, the situation looks quite different, and is seen in more humorous light. One teacher from another department described "this convoluted little policy they had where there were nine thousand ways one got into mathematics. There was pre-algebra, pre-pre-algebra, pre-pre-pre algebra, and things like that" (SC001.01:19).

In English the anger over recent changes is least obvious, and the retreat into departmental boundaries seems least deliberate--it just seems to have happened. A Science teacher characterized this department as only having two or three activists around any issue, the rest "whatever happens, happens" (SC001.01). But while they have not rebelled or withdrawn from the unit structure, what they have done is to quietly congregate within the unit to which their chair is assigned. When the administrators realized that this unit had a disproportionate number of English teachers (teachers had been given some choice of membership) they changed the official assignments, but the teachers have crept back, unofficially. and quietly.

For the English teachers the importance of the departmental community is described not in technical, or in political terms but in social terms of friendship, of individual rather than categorical identification. Often it is not directly stated at all, but comes out almost parenthetically: when asked about who her colleagues would be, one began, "Peggy, who's one of the other English teachers, and Denise, who's next door who's another English teacher. . . ; Nira is also an English teacher. . . we were young, bright, and eager English teachers together more years ago than we want to admit." (RA038.U:3). Another echoed this same theme, with the personal identifications first,

and the professional or pedagogical connections almost as afterthoughts: "Most of the time I spend with two other English teachers. . . and then outside of school I have a lot of friends, who are also English teachers, . . . with the teachers here I would say it's mostly social. . . although we do talk some about teaching, but the two I'm best friends with don't teach anything remotely like what I'm teaching. . . although [we] did at one time collaborate. . "(RA003.U:1).

Department as Community

The stories these teachers tell provide brief glimpses into how departments have developed into distinct professional communities within Rancho, and also of the variety of functions that those communities can serve, even within the same school. They are, as the English teachers suggest, the site for personal connections which support and sustain individuals, a "comfort zone" which may, as needed, unobtrusively encourage professional development. They provide, as the Math and Science teachers attest, a mechanism for getting desired work accomplished--and an arena for having it valued. And as Science teachers demonstrate, they are a base for political action, for pulling in resources and for pushing agendas. They are a likely site for clearly defined and potent communities to form within the school.

This is not to suggest that departmental divisions are inevitable, but rather that they are remarkably resilient, even when deliberately targeted for extinction. And it is not to suggest that departments are the only sites around which distinctive communities can form, but rather that the conditions within schools and the pressures from without make them highly likely sites. And understanding that there are likely, resilient, and consequential professional communities within high schools can further educators attempts to analyze or to reform them.

The Rancho case provides an example of planned change, of a series of unplanned changes which result from its embeddedness in the larger, turbulent community of educational policymakers, and of the power and resilience of departmental boundaries in defining subcommunities within the high school. It is not an example of failed change, for many of the original features of the Rancho plan are retained, are purposeful, and remain important to the staff, but of the changing nature of change

efforts as they are implemented and interpreted in the contexts of multiple communities, over time. It provides a window through which to view teachers' experiences with initiating, resisting, and accommodating both change and stability in a changing world, and the importance of professional communities in making sense of those experiences.

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